

U.S. Treasury is considering bill changes

By Roger Boye

The Treasury Department still may give U.S. currency a facelift despite criticism from some congressmen.

"We're collecting research for a possible mid-summer meeting with the Treasury secretary," said Carl D'Alessandro, a spokesman for the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. "We would make specific recommendations [for design changes], discuss the trade-offs and attempt to come to a consensus."

For many months, top-level bureaucrats have studied ways to protect "folding money" from counterfeiters using improved color copiers. Experts predict that by 1987, as many as 2,000 such machines will be in use in the country, most capable of making quality reproductions of dollar bills.

Changes under study at the BEP and elsewhere in government include adding subtle colors or three-dimensional optical devices to currency. But a few congressmen are wary of any revisions, in part because of what they believe is undue secrecy in the Treasury Department.

For example, Rep. Toby Roth [R., Wis.] told a Numismatic News reporter that the lack of information is bound to generate suspicion.

"The Treasury is planning substantial changes in our currency, and not even one member of Congress in a hundred knows about it," Roth said.

In an April 18 interview, D'Alessandro dismissed such criticism, saying the Treasury has been "open with everyone" in discussing the counterfeiting threat and in describing possible design changes in general terms. Officials have kept specific recommendations secret to "protect the product" and to "prevent theory and rumor," he added.

BEP Director Robert J. Leuver said last year that whatever changes are made, the government would retain the "basic design architecture" of currency, including the green backs and black fronts. At that time, Leuver said he and his staff were studying the use of reflective inks and paper bearing special security threads or watermarks, among other things.

Under current law, Treasury Secretary James A. Baker has authority to alter the design of currency. If Baker approves specific recommendations by year's end, as is possible, the revamped currency could begin circulating by late 1986.